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SUBJECT: CAMEROON SCENSETTER FOR GENERAL WARD'S FEBRUARY
21-22, 2008 VISIT

REF: A. YAOUNDE 103
[B](#). 07 YAOUNDE 1308
[C](#). 06 YAOUNDE 1051
[D](#). 06 YAOUNDE 1179

Classified By: Ambassador Janet E. Garvey for reasons 1.4 (d) and (e).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Welcome back to Cameroon. Since your July 2006 visit (refs b and c), we have made much progress on military cooperation with Cameroon, highlighted by the launch of the ACOTA program in 2007. Following the standing up of the new Africa Command, we have also engaged in a robust outreach campaign to explain AFRICOM's objectives to Cameroonian policymakers and the media. The USG's priority interests here continue to be promoting democracy and good governance, strengthening economic prosperity, and collaborating on security. Progress in democratic development has been slow and the economy continues to fall below its potential, growing at around 3 percent each year. Cameroon has been one of the more stable, economically prosperous countries in Central Africa, but it is still considered to be among the most corrupt countries in the world. President Paul Biya has been in power since 1982 and recently said he would amend the constitution to eliminate presidential term limits, suggesting he may stay on past 2011, when his current term is due to expire. Biya is concerned about security, welcomes AFRICOM, is very appreciative of USG mil-mil cooperation, and views closer engagement with the U.S. as beneficial to Cameroon. End summary.

Introduction

[2](#). (U) Cameroon is one of the more stable and prosperous countries in Central Africa. With a population of approximately 17.3 million and a land mass roughly the size of California, it is described as "Africa in Miniature" because of its great geographical variety, estimated 250 ethnic groups, and distinct anglophone and francophone regions (English and French are both official languages, although French is more commonly spoken). First visited by the Portuguese in the 1500s (Cameroon's name comes from the Portuguese word for shrimp, which were found in abundance), Cameroon became a German colony in 1884, and was partitioned between Britain and France by a League of Nations mandate after World War I. French Cameroon became independent in 1960, soon joined by the southern third of British Cameroon (the northern two thirds voted to join Nigeria). Cameroon's first President Ahmadou Ahidjo formed a unitary state upon adopting a constitution in 1972.

[3](#). (U) President Paul Biya, Ahidjo's Prime Minister, came to power when Ahidjo unexpectedly resigned for health reasons in 1982. For the next ten years, Biya survived a series of crises. He weathered a power struggle with Ahidjo and a coup attempt in 1984, an economic crisis, and major social unrest

in 1990-92. In response, he began a slow reform process, adopting an IMF structural adjustment process in 1988 and allowing the country's first (though seriously flawed) multiparty elections in 1992. He implemented a 1994 currency devaluation to make the economy more competitive, created a new, more liberal constitution in 1996 and gradually liberalized the media. President Biya won reelection in 2004 and his party increased its parliamentary majority in 2007 legislative elections. While both elections suffered from irregularities, they were marginally more democratic than previous ones. Biya is constitutionally required to step down in 2011, when the next presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled; however, in his 2008 New Year's speech, Biya announced his intention to amend the constitution to eliminate term limits, thus allowing the possibility that he may stay on beyond 2011.

US-Cameroon Relations

14. (SBU) The United States celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations with Cameroon in 2007. We have excellent bilateral ties with Cameroon, our primary interests being: to strengthen democracy and good governance; to foster economic prosperity and development; and to collaborate on security and international issues. The Embassy has nearly 60 Direct Hire Americans and more than 220 Locally Engaged Staff. Our main activities are:

-- Democracy Building: We deploy a wide range of activities to encourage democratic development, including a broad array of Public Diplomacy programs. In the past year, we sponsored a Human Rights Day roundtable on the new Criminal Procedure Code, a roundtable on constitutional change and democracy,

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organized several events about the U.S. primary election and sent election observer teams to both the July and September legislative elections. I and my predecessor have been outspoken against corruption, electoral fraud and changing executive term limits. We engage the government actively on anti-corruption efforts, including supporting efforts to identify overseas deposits of ill-gotten money.

-- Economic Advocacy: We regularly engage the government on investment climate issues. We actively support U.S. companies, including celebrating the success of Transnational Automotive Group (TAUG), which won the 2007 Secretary of State Corporate Excellence Award. EXIM Bank, OPIC, USDA, and the US Trade Development Agency are active in Cameroon.

-- Development Assistance: We have one of the largest and oldest Peace Corps programs in the world (currently with 120 Volunteers), focused on education, health and small business development. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Cameroon does groundbreaking research on HIV/AIDS and provides AIDS screening throughout the country. Other bilateral assistance includes the US Department of Agriculture's Food for Progress programs (focused on food security), and small funds to support refugees, democracy and human rights, Self Help projects, and environmental activities. USAID closed its office in Cameroon in 1994 but retains about \$1.5 million in programming here, largely focused on the health sector, and managed out of its regional office in Accra.

-- Mil-Mil Engagement: One of the strongest components of our bilateral relationship is our military-military relationship. This includes ACOTA peacekeeping training, about \$300,000 in IMET annually, various ongoing FMF cases valued at about \$1 million, humanitarian assistance, and increasingly strong engagement on maritime security. In the past year, five US Navy ships have visited Cameroon, we installed the first AIS system in Central Africa and the first installed on a ship and an airplane anywhere in Africa. Your visit comes two weeks after a maritime security

workshop run by DIILS, the visit of the USS Swift (which donated food and medical supplies to help Chadian refugees in northern Cameroon), and during the return visit to Limbe of the USS Fort McHenry. Cameroon has offered to deploy up 800 troops for UN/AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur but the UN has determined that they do not yet have the necessary equipment to contribute effectively (light armored vehicles in particular). Cameroon is scheduled to send a 120-man contingent to reinforce the FOMUC mission in the Central African Republic, and also has units of police and gendarmes that are ostensibly ready to deploy in support of regional PKO missions. However, these units are still in need of certain mission-essential equipment.

--American Citizen Services and Consular Work: With three full-time Consular Officers and ten Locally-Engaged Staff, the Yaounde Consular Section is the largest in the region, often called upon to support neighboring Embassies (as is the case now in N'djamena). The Section's paramount responsibility is to provide services to American citizens, about 2,000 of whom are estimated to live in Cameroon. The American community is clustered around Douala (petroleum and trading companies) and Yaounde (the American school, international organizations) with a sizable missionary presence scattered around the country. The Section sees almost 15,000 non-immigrant visa applications (including about 2,000 students) annually, of which roughly half are issued, and reviews 3,000 immigrant visa cases, which include the Diversity Visa (visa lottery) and Cameroonians joining family members in the U.S. Rampant corruption and fraud complicate consular work in Cameroon and have led to the establishment of various smuggling operations, many of which take advantage of asylum procedures which are intended to protect individuals with a fear of return to their home country.

Politics Centralized But Fragile

15. (U) The political space has opened somewhat in Cameroon over the past decade. There are eight parties in the country's unicameral parliament; the media is relatively free; the protection of human rights has gradually improved, including the passage of a landmark Criminal Procedure Code in 2007; Cameroon is welcoming to refugees; civil society is slowly gaining a greater voice.

16. (U) Nonetheless, Cameroon's democratic institutions remain very weak. Political power is highly centralized, with Presidentially-appointed Governors of the ten provinces and Presidentially-appointed mayors of major cities. The

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ruling Cameroon Democratic People's Party (CPDM) has 153 of the 180 seats in parliament. All of Cameroon's elections have been flawed, including the 2007 parliamentary elections, which was marred by vote rigging and suffered from low turnout. The judiciary lacks independence and there remain serious human rights concerns,

17. (SBU) Cameroon's weak democratic institutions pose social and long-term political challenges. Cameroon ranks toward the bottom of global corruption and governance surveys (Transparency International ranked Cameroon 138 out of 179 in its 2007 Corruption Perception Index). There are high levels of banditry and other forms of crime. The constitution does not provide for a viable succession process and many Cameroonians (even the President's detractors) fear that, under the current system, Biya's death could trigger chaos or a military intervention.

18. (SBU) President Biya, who recently celebrated his 75th birthday and his 25th year in power, announced on January 1, 2008 his plans to amend Article 6 of the constitution, thereby eliminating the two-term presidential term limit. He is expected to send this amendment to parliament this year,

possibly in March, and may also amend other parts of the 1996 constitution. There has been widespread discontent voiced about amending Article 6 by opposition political parties, civil society and the independent media. However, while opposition frustration is mounting, it has not yet resulted in demonstrations or civil action of any significant nature. In a February 5 speech, Ambassador Garvey publicly stated USG opposition to changing executive term limits, especially when they can be perceived as benefiting one individual or group. This speech and an Embassy-hosted constitutional roundtable on February 14 have garnered significant media attention.

Economy Not Reaching Potential

¶9. (U) Cameroon is the largest economy of the six-nation Central African Economic and Monetary Union (CEMAC), with a GDP of \$17 billion (2007) and annual growth of around 3% between 2005 and 2007. Cameroon boasts one of the highest per capita incomes (by purchasing power parity) in sub-Saharan Africa, at \$2,300 (2007). The country's wealth of natural resources include a rich potential in agriculture, forestry, and mining.

¶10. (U) Major exports are oil (about 85,000 barrels/day and on the decline) and cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, timber, cotton and bananas. The European Union is Cameroon's largest trading partner (especially France), although U.S. exports increased by 6.4% from 2006 to 2007, while imports dropped by 38% to 169 million in 2007 (using annualized 9-month data). The United States is reportedly the largest foreign direct investor in Cameroon, largely due to the substantial American equity in the Chad-Cameroon pipeline and the power sector. This may be boosted in the coming year by sizable U.S. investments in hotels, mining (cobalt and bauxite), and energy.

¶11. (U) The government predicts 4.5-5.5% GDP growth in 2008, benefiting from expected new investments in construction, mining, and forestry. However, this may be difficult to achieve. The 2008 budget includes little new public investment and budget execution in the past has been poor. Cameroon benefited from significant debt relief after reaching "completion point" under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative in 2006; however, this has yet to benefit the economy and there is substantial untapped liquidity in the banking sector. Cameroon continues to have one of the world's most challenging business environments, ranking 154 out of 178 countries surveyed in the World Bank's 2007 "Doing Business" evaluation. Infrastructure is poor and privatization has stalled. While there is insufficient poverty data, there is a perception that poverty and inequality have increased, fueled by perceived rising inflation (officially 4.4%).

Comment

¶12. (C) 2008 could be a critical year for Cameroon. If the government makes the right economic decisions, it is poised to use billions of dollars in debt relief, strong commodity prices, and several large pending foreign investments to spring onto a higher economic growth path. However, Biya's planned constitutional change has shifted attention away from the economy to politics. The President shuffled his Cabinet in September 2007, removing some of the most corrupt officials, and he is expected to make more Cabinet changes soon. This could help refocus his government, but could also

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heighten internal political tensions. Biya still voices commitment to fighting corruption and several officials have been convicted of corruption in the past year. A list of 56 allegedly corrupt, senior political figures was recently published in the media, which could strengthen the hand of those fighting corruption, but is also likely to

significantly increase tensions at the top levels of government.

¶13. (C) Biya is a cautious, enigmatic leader, who often cites the country's diversity, insecure neighborhood and political friction at the top as posing threats to stability, and therefore justifying his continued tight hold on power. Because of these concerns, Biya's cautious nature, and his lack of a good exit strategy, we expect that as 2011 begins to loom on the horizon, he will continue to move slowly on economic and political reform. Many of Biya's concerns about internal and regional security seem legitimate (as evidenced by the December 2007 killing of 21 Cameroonian soldiers in Bakassi, we think by Nigerian criminals) and the President was very appreciative of USG mil-mil assistance during my recent meeting with him (ref A). The President welcomes AFRICOM and wants to strengthen U.S.-Cameroon relations, especially in investment and security cooperation. While he may voice some frustration at the USG's position on constitutional change, he and the Prime Minister (a good friend of American interests) will be very pleased to see you and will hope to strengthen already growing mil-mil ties.
GARVEY